1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

836 II. His sister married Gecha Harma of Udala Tondawada, and at the wedding he met Harma's sister Gecha Kowe, and danced with her. They liked each other, and met at other weddings and at koqsar dances, and had sexual intercourse two or three times, which Moda said was necessary in order to ascertain that they were both physically capable. Everyone saw that they were in love, and their wedding followed as soon as the necessary betrothal ceremonies could be completed. But if pre-marital intercourse results in pregnancy, there can be no formal marriage, which the Hill Marias call *marmi* and the Bison-horn *pendul*; the girl states the name of the man responsible, and goes to live in his house without any ceremony, the union being described as *ottur* ('taken away'). A child born to a girl without even *ottur* would be considered as belonging to the clan of the man whom the mother names as the father; and this putative father would be expected to take the mother and child to his house, the union being known to the Hill Marias as *ahene-hattu* ('thus-went'). No stigma attaches to such unions, and the children have exactly the same position and rights as the children of a formal marriage.

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584 Hill Maria parents do not try to interfere in their children's choice of wives and husbands. When a youth and his girl know their minds, each tells his or her parents. Then the youth's parents, with the elders of the village, go, without the youth, with about a rupee's worth of *mahua* spirit (or five bottles) to the girl's parents, taking care to arrive at their house at about four or five o'clock in the afternoon. The father of the youth opens the door of the girl's house, places the liquor bottles inside the threshold and rejoins his party, all of whom sit silent outside the door. The girl's parents then call in some of the elders of their village, and in their presence tell the girl that this liquor has been brought on her account, and ask her if she is willing to go and live with the youth in the village from which the liquor has come. If the girl agrees, the liquor is at once drunk by the parties from the two villages, and the girl's parents entertain the visiting party to supper; if she refuses, the youth's parents take the liquor back to their village. This ceremony is called *talq-da'ina* ('going to ask'). It may take place on any day of the year, Hill Marias recking nothing of auspicious days or omens.

Hill Maria regular betrothal and marriage

[787]

There is a second *talq-da'ina*, generally after an interval of about a year; it sometimes takes place sooner, but it is considered bad form to be too importunate. The youth does not go with his parents even this time; he does not, indeed, meet his betrothed between the first *talq-da'ina* and marriage, as, once a girl's hand

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

as it is a purely biological question; but some such solution of the difficulty seems to me the only one, unless I have missed some very important ethnological clue.[1]

The problem thus posed presents itself in a peculiarly acute form when we consider conditions of life in the ghotul. For here, boys and girls—in spite of various checks and disciplines—cohabit from the period of their first tentative experiments, through full sexual maturity, for five to eight years until their freedom is ended by marriage. Yet here too pregnancies are comparatively rare and, though various contraceptive means are practised, few of them have physiological properties.

The incidence of pregnancy, however, is higher than that discovered by Malinowski in the Trobriands. Out of 2000 cases, 80 men admitted to having made their ghotul partners pregnant, and in the 220 ghotul examined, I found a history of 327 pregnant girls.

I believe that these figures are reasonably accurate. Although there is a strict rule against any member of the ghotul revealing even to the elders of the tribe, let alone to an inquisitive outsider, the fact that a motiari is pregnant at the moment, this reticence is no check on the loquacity of older men about matters long since past. As we shall see, there is no moral or social stigma attaching to pre-marital pregnancy; it is rather a matter of business, a complicated financial transaction. Everyone in the ghotul hushes it up rather as one might hush up a friend's mistakes or follies, anxious only to get him off. But once it is all over, the bills paid, the girl married, the child accepted as a full member of its legal father's family and clan, the real father allows himself the pleasures of retrospection; he recalls the potency of former days and finds it not ungratifying to remember what a lad he was.

Eighty pregnancies out of 2000 is 4 per cent, much more than Malinowski's figure, astonishingly more than Rivers'—and this in spite of the fact that the Muria admit to contraceptive practices that are denied in the Trobriand and Eddystone Islands. It is possible that a statistical, instead of a genealogical, inquiry would have yielded higher figures, at least in the Eddystone Islands. The genealogical method is not the best way to discover 'illegitimate' births among primitive people, for the whole trend of primitive society is to legitimatize births wherever possible.

Yet although the older Muria are not unwilling to admit the scandals of long ago, it is regarded as vitally important for a Muria girl to avoid conception. Pre-nuptial intercourse is socially recognized, and even tacitly approved, yet pre-nuptial pregnancy is at the moment of its occurrence a major social disaster, the chief anxiety of ghotul life, the one cloud upon its dreamland. It brings disgrace upon the ghotul, it endangers the girl's normal marriage prospects, it imposes a heavy financial burden upon the boy's parents and it casts a momentary shadow over the whole village. It is sometimes believed that a youth who has 'wasted his seed'[2] in making a motiari pregnant will be sterile later in life. On joining the ghotul the little chelik and motiari are solemnly warned both by their parents and by the ghotul leaders of the risks of pregnancy and are told how to avoid it.

For the Muria have a vivid appreciation of the fact of physiological paternity. The answer to the riddle 'Out of water, bones' is 'Semen and a child'.

[1] Malinowski, op. cit., p. 168.

[2] The expression used for a girl is *was bigad gaya*, 'her nerve is broken', if she conceives out of due time.

THE MURIA AND THEIR GHOTUL

were a number of older girls there; in other places, where only a few motiari exceed three years from the menarche, such large-scale abortifacient practices appear to be unnecessary. In any case the practice is not approved by the elders of the tribe. In Hathipakna, the Malko was made pregnant by the Jamadar, both being of the same clan. An older man tried to procure an abortion, but failed; the matter became known and he was fined five rupees by the clan panchayat.

If all their efforts fail, the chelik and motiari report the matter to the ghotul leaders, who keep it dark as long as possible. There is no greater ghotul crime than to reveal such a secret in the village.

In the meantime the girl may elope with the same or another lover, and get married quietly elsewhere. If the marriage season is at hand, it is not uncommon for the parents to hurry on the marriage with the girl's original betrothed, and for no one to say anything about it. When this happens it is whispered that 'the girl has a baby in her *haldi-dhoti*', that is, while she is still wearing the clothes stained with the marriage oil.

If neither of these solutions are possible, the headman and elders of the village hold a panchayat in the ghotul, at which all the chelik and motiari must be present. The headman says, 'By whose hand is this? Whose is this belly?' The girl says nothing but goes to the boy responsible and takes him by the hand. If the parents of her betrothed are present, the headman says, 'Look, your goods are damaged; do you still want them or no?' He turns to the girl and says, referring to her betrothed, 'Do you still want this boy or no?'

One of two things thus can happen. If the girl's betrothed is willing to have her, and she has no objection, the marriage is performed as soon as possible. The chelik who caused the pregnancy has to pay some compensation to the husband as well as a fine to the panchayat. This happens more commonly than one would expect; if a girl is pregnant, even by another boy, it is at least a proof that she will not be barren. Out of the 80 pregnancies to which I have referred already, in only 26 cases did the girl marry her lover; in the other 54 cases she married her betrothed.

Where the girl refuses to marry her betrothed or he decides that he does not want her, as happened in the 26 cases, she declares in the panchayat. 'This boy has given me this belly. I will go with him and never leave him.' When she says this, her parents abuse her, for it will mean financial loss to them, and the elders give everyone a lecture, pointing out that such things never happened in their day and that with a little care all such scandals could be avoided. When the Kotwar of Atpal made a girl pregnant, the elders fined him and reproved him with the words, 'When a mare has an itch for it, she allows the horse to mount her, but she knows she cannot stop the seed from entering her. You too knew it, so why were you not careful?'

A long discussion, generally entirely financial, follows. Fines are imposed and compensation decided. The village elders demand their share. The marriage is arranged as soon as possible.

In either case, the child is accepted by its real or legal father, and the origin of its birth is soon forgotten. It carries little stigma, and once the financial side of the incident is settled, little more is said. For the disgrace and danger of a pregnancy is not a moral one. A pregnancy is dreaded because everyone makes a fuss, the routine of daily life is upset, the matrimonial arrangements so carefully devised to unite families and repay old debts are disturbed, there is a general feeling that someone has blundered. The chelik and motiari are embarrassed, but they are not ashamed.

THE PROBLEM OF GHOTUL INFERTILITY

Sometimes, indeed, the chelik actually try to make a girl pregnant. In Kanhargaon, two very popular motiari were betrothed to boys at Nayanar. The Kanhargaon chelik did all they could to make them pregnant so that they could force them into marriage and keep them in their own village. But they were unsuccessful, and in the end one of the girls was seduced by her own betrothed at a marriage, became pregnant and was hastily married to him. It is not uncommon, though I have no statistics on the point, for engaged couples whose parents unduly delay their marriage to force the issue either by eloping together or by trying to achieve a pregnancy.

But on the whole, the admirable ghotul rule that engaged couples should have nothing to do with one another before marriage is carefully observed. Out of 113 Lamhada boys serving for their wives and in close proximity for several years to the girls they were going to marry, only 5 made them pregnant.

Pre-nuptial pregnancy does not seem to injure the couple's relationships in marriage, provided a youth marries the girl himself. Of the 26 chelik who married the motiari they made pregnant, not one made a failure of his domestic life. At the time of my inquiries every one of them was living with his original partner and very happy with her. But those who had infertile sexual connexion with their wives before marriage showed a comparatively high divorce rate. Of the 316 who admitted to this, 14 had unsuccessful marriages. Of these 77 were the regular ghotul-wives of my informants and 68 of them were still living together when I inquired.

In only three cases during the last twenty years has a pregnancy been taken so seriously as to lead to tragedy. Two of these were the suicides which I have already described in Chapter XV. But here it was not so much the pregnancy itself as the fact that the pregnancy was the result of a connexion between chelik and motiari of the same clan that mattered. The third tragedy appears to have been due largely to a chelik's fear of the disgrace and expense, especially as it was his second experience of the kind.

At the beginning of April 1942, Birjhu, a chelik of the Aturbera ghotul, discovered with dismay that his motiari, Mori, was pregnant. Only a year before he had made another girl pregnant in the ghotul, had refused to marry her and had forced his parents to pay compensation. They did so, but they made many threats as to what they would do if it occurred again. Mori, who seems to have been in love with the boy, said that he must marry her, but Birjhu refused and said that if she told anybody that it was through him that she had conceived, he would kill her. After a little while, however, the poor girl told her brother's wife about it. When Birjhu heard she had done so, he planned to carry out his threat. On the night of the 14th of April, he told Mori he would do what she wanted and they had better elope together and get married in another village. Late at night they crept stealthily out of the ghotul and made their way through the forest. But suddenly, before they had gone very far, Birjhu caught hold of the girl and strangled her. Then he dragged her body below a tree and tied a rope round the neck to make it look as though the girl had committed suicide.

The following day a report was made at the Narayanpur police station that Mori had committed suicide. When Birjhu heard that the matter had gone to the police, he was frightened but possibly even more he was overwhelmed with sorrow and misery at what he had done. He disappeared, and two days later hanged himself from a tree in the jungle.

But this is the only incident of the kind that has yet been recorded.

Such is the general picture, familiar to students of pre-marital freedom everywhere. How are we to explain the fact that through all the years of

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
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674 336 [348] Murders committed on account of an unwelcome and unexpected pregnancy are not common, because of the high standard of domestic morals among the Maria and because if an unmarried girl is found pregnant, she is immediately married and the child is thus legitimized. But there is one authentic case in which a man was driven to kill his lover, though it may be said that it was her stupidity rather than her pregnancy that caused the tragedy. Mase was the wife of a man who deserted her for the Tea Gardens, leaving her alone and unsupported with three little children. She used to make some sort of living as a coolie. But presently Poriami Hirma fell in love with her and used constantly to visit her in her house, although he never officially kept her as his wife. In time she became pregnant and a panchayat was called to consider the matter. The elders decided to send information to Mase's husband's elder brother, an ex-convict and a harsh violent man, of whom the girl was greatly afraid.

Early in the morning of Tuesday, 21 February 1933, Mase left her three children in the house and went to tell Hirma what had happened. She expected that her husband's elder brother would come that day and beat her and she suggested that Hirma should run away with her and hide. Hirma agreed and they went some way into the jungle and sat down under a tamarind tree. The weather was cold and they lit a fire, beside which they sat and talked. Mase was very frightened and depressed. She wept and threatened to kill herself. Hirma very properly asked her to come and live with him as his wife, and promised to look after her and the children. But the girl, who was obviously in

674 684 seduced Kande's first wife, and the proper ceremonies of purification had been conducted. But when Kande took another wife, the father again attempted or, as some say, succeeded in seducing her, and this time there was a violent quarrel between father and son while they were catching birds in the jungle. The father actually complained to his son that the girl did not respond properly to his advances. Kande was assaulted by his father and killed him in return. When I saw this boy in jail a year later, the extraordinary sadness of his face contrasted strikingly with the expression of many of the more regular criminals. The villagers concealed the crime and when it was by chance discovered five months later, were very backward in co-operating with the police. Obviously as in the Mundra case, they considered it a very proper murder. But Kande was not so fortunate as Mundra and was sentenced not to a month, but to five years' imprisonment. This was later reduced to three years, and he was released in 1943.